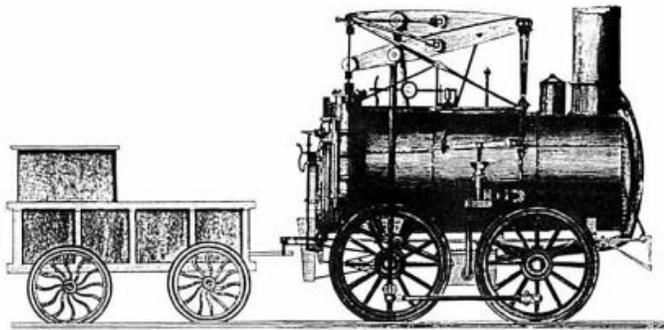


The Stourbridge “Lion” and Other Recollections from the Colonie Railroad Yards

Many Cohoesiers were employed over the years at the Colonie railroad yards, once located just outside of Watervliet near Route 155 and the Arsenal. The yards, built in 1912, were conceived and designed by railroad innovator and D&H President L.F. Loree. The Colonie yard had the first self-contained back shop for maintenance, construction, and research and development. The site included a roundhouse, powerhouse, car shop, planning mill, truck shop and other structures in addition to the enormous locomotive shop. Several important technical advances were developed at the Colonie yards, including the first welded locomotive boiler, the first roller-bearing rods for locomotives, experimental concrete rail cross ties, and uniflow design cylinder castings that permitted high-pressure operation.

At its peak of operation in the 1920s, the rail yards employed more than 2,500 people. The boiler shop in 1934 consisted of three boilermaker’s foremen, two boiler inspectors, one layer-out, two flue welders, forty-three boilermakers, fifty advanced workers and helpers, thirteen boiler welders and acetylene burners, and two rivet heaters. In 1923 the pay for the boilermaker welder and inspector was 45 cents per hour, initially paid monthly. In time this increased to three days per month, then two days, and finally a weekly paycheck was earned. By 1952 a changeover from steam to diesel resulted in many employee lay-offs. The work force was cut to fourteen boilermakers, then eight, and finally one, with one boilermaker welder. The 150 ton cranes no longer required for working on the trains were dismantled, and during the 1930s and 1940s all of the camelback (double) cabs were converted to singles.

There were once many regular and excursion trains running in and out of the Colonie yards. The main passenger routes were from Wilkes-Barre and Scranton, Pennsylvania to Montreal, Canada. Once-common milk trains were discontinued and over time six transfer jobs were cut to two and all steam locomotives were transformed to diesels. The Horatio Allen locomotive No. 1400 was dedicated and christened in 1924. This powerful engine carried 350 pounds of boiler pressure as compared with the 225-250 pounds for the 1500-1600 type class. The 1401 and 1402 models carried 400 pounds of steam pressure. These were followed by the 1403, called the Mallet (Brute), the first in the railroad world to carry 500 pounds of steam pressure. In 1973, in commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Delaware and Hudson Railroad Corporation, a display train toured the area powered by the two largest and newest diesels.



The Stourbridge Lion. Image courtesy of Wayne County (PA) Historical Society.

A replica of the Stourbridge Lion, the first steam locomotive operated on a commercial line in the United States, was once on display at the east gate of the Colonie railroad yards. The original was built in 1828 and designed in Stourbridge, England. The replica, which resembled a giant grasshopper, was rebuilt by the men at the Colonie D&H boiler shops for the D&H Exhibit at Chicago’s Century of Progress Exposition in 1933. The “Lion” (so named because the original locomotive had a lion’s head painted on the front) had wooden wheels and spokes with an iron band around the wheels that was riveted on. It took from 16 to 24 hours to drive

the rivets, which had to be replaced when they burned into the wood. After many years, the “Lion” was sold for junk, but the Lindsay and Earl Foundry yard recognized its value and sent it to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

The railroad was an important factor in our country’s industrial growth following the Erie Canal and it was regrettable to see its prominence fade. Unfortunately, the Colonie railyard fell victim to neglect and decline, as the long-abandoned site was devastated by fires in 2001 and 2004 and much was lost despite efforts by railroad historians to preserve this important piece of transportation history.

This article, published in the Fall 2008 issue of the Spindle City Historic Society newsletter, was excerpted from information provided by Michael Piterniak, a former acetylene cutter in the Colonie yards and member of the Cohoes Moose Lodge 1332.